

World Bank and Verizon Chiefs Say Digital ID Part of “Social Contract” Between Government and Citizens



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Mar 17, 2024 2 min



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The list of supporters and promoters of the implementation of digital IDs, strongly criticized by privacy and security advocates, quite unsurprisingly includes the likes of the World Bank and Verizon.

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What is interesting is the way they are explaining the push, and also how they propose to make mass, worldwide adoption of digital IDs a reality. There's also a corporate-speak cliché-in-the-making for all this: "digital transformation journey."

The pairing that is the World Bank and Verizon makes sense because in order to have people's identities and financial assets centralized in the way proposed by various digital ID schemes, they need to first have access to the internet.

A recent meeting in Washington DC, dubbed the Global Digital Summit, saw the two respective financial and telecommunications heavy-hitters "agree" that governments must make digital IDs a component of what's known as the social contract with citizens.

What this would mean is that citizens willingly defer to the authorities as they accept digital IDs, and do this supposedly to their own advantage.

World Bank Group President Ajay Banga seemed particularly keen on expanding digital ID adoption "top-down," by getting as many governments as possible on side, who would then, thanks to the "social contract" idea, impose it on citizens – rather than wait for citizens to, if ever, warm up to the scheme.

"I think that if governments embrace digital, they would create transparency, clean governance, and citizen engagement," Banga said.

He also noted that the World Bank is spending money in Africa in a bid to "give" access to electricity to hundreds of millions of people who don't yet have it – as the precondition for getting them "connected."

Banga also complained that there are many people around the world who do have access to the internet – but this potential is underused.

Verizon CEO Hans Vestberg, naturally, agreed that the world needs more connectivity – for the sake of "digital transformation," and both said they believe improving this situation would speed up "socio-economic" development.

It looks like when selling the digital ID idea (and possibly, experimenting with implementations), undeveloped and developing countries are an important target, while promises of economic progress are a way of persuading them to join in.

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